

Chemical Dependency Paper: Fentanyl in Schools

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“Fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered. Fentanyl is everywhere, from large metropolitan areas to rural America; no community is safe from this poison. We must take every opportunity to spread the word to prevent fentanyl-related overdose death and poisonings from claiming scores of American lives every day” (Milgram, 2023).

Fentanyl is a drug that almost everyone knows about now due to how deadly it is and how much it has been on the news, not for good reason. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid drug that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for pain relief and as an anesthetic. It can be snorted, smoked, used as a patch, and taken orally by pill. Fentanyl is either sold by itself or used in combination with other substances. On top of how it is sold, Fentanyl has been found in fake pills like oxycodone. An overdose of Fentanyl can cause changes in pupil size, stupor, cyanosis, coma, and respiratory failure, which can lead to death (DEA, 2023). Fentanyl is approximately 100 times stronger than morphine and 50 times stronger than heroin. It is a significant contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses here in the United States. This super deadly drug is not just killing people in our country; it is also killing children inside our schools.

As described above, there are two types of fentanyl: illegally made fentanyl (IMF) and pharmaceutical fentanyl. The most recent cases of fentanyl-related overdoses are connected to illegally made fentanyl. This is most likely due to its heroin effect, and in turn, illegally made fentanyl makes drugs cheaper, more addictive, more powerful, and most important of them all, it makes them more dangerous/deadly. Illegally made fentanyl comes in many different forms, but most commonly, it is a powder-like substance. Fentanyl-laced drugs are hazardous, and many people are not aware that the medications they are taking are laced with fentanyl, and it risks death even more.

Even in super small doses, fentanyl can be deadly. “Over 150 people die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl” (CDC, 2023). The reason fentanyl is super scary is because if drugs contained deadly levels of fentanyl, which is not much at all, you would not be able to see it, taste it, or even smell it. It is almost impossible to know or tell if drugs have been laced with fentanyl. However, you can test drugs with fentanyl test strips, which would inform you if medications have been laced with the deadly fentanyl.

The CDC has five steps that you should follow if you think someone is overdosing. “It may be hard to tell whether a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you are not sure, treat it like an overdose – you could save a life” (CDC, 2023). I believe that these five steps should be posted on a wall in every school nationwide due to the recent cases of fentanyl being in our schools. This would help everyone stay safe and help someone in case it is ever needed. Step one is to call 911 immediately; step two is to administer naloxone, also known as Narcan, if available. Step three is to try to keep the person awake, and breathing, step four is to lay the person on their side to prevent choking, and the fifth and final step is to stay with the person until emergency assistance arrives. All of these steps are vital, and they can save a person’s life. I firmly believe it is always better to be safe than sorry. So, with that said, every school nationwide should have a program in place to teach everyone at the school how to help someone if they are experiencing an overdose. Something that every school should also have just in case of an emergency is naloxone, also known as Narcan.

Naloxone (Narcan) is a lifesaving medication that can reverse the effects of an overdose of opioids like fentanyl when it is given in time. Naloxone is super easy to use and very small to carry. You do not need medical training to administer it; it comes as an injectable or a prefilled nasal spray. “Naloxone quickly reverses an overdose by blocking the effects of opioids. It can

restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes in a person whose breath has slowed or even stopped. More than one dose of naloxone may be required when stronger opioids like fentanyl are involved” (*Lifesaving Naloxone*, n.d.). Naloxone can save lives, and that is why schools must start carrying this life-saving drug in case of an emergency. It is sad to think about schools taking these kinds of medications because schools are supposed to be a drug-free, accessible, safe place for everyone. However, this is the reality we now live in, where there are more and more cases of students dying from fentanyl in schools, and that is why naloxone should be in every school. If they have Epi-pens, why not have naloxone? Naloxone is available in all 50 states, and you can get it at your local pharmacy in most states.

As of last month, naloxone is now stocked in New York City public high schools, according to CBS News. “In New York City, health data shows fentanyl was involved in 81% of all overdoses last year” (Bisram, 2023). High schools are also handing out fentanyl strips to the student’s families so they can help to identify if a pill or any form of a drug has fentanyl in it. This epidemic is super scary, but schools nationwide are taking the proper steps to have preventative measures in place in case of an emergency. So many new laws and standards have been recently passed or signed into law due to the ever-rising toll of people dying, especially kids at schools. A few days ago, the state of California signed ‘Melanie’s Law’ into effect, which is aimed at preventing fentanyl overdoses in California schools. Melanie Ramos was a 15-year-old student who came into contact with fentanyl and overdosed at her high school. “Melanie’s Law requires all California middle and high schools to come up with a plan to prevent and respond to fentanyl overdoses. This includes training teachers on life-saving fentanyl response and providing students and adults resources on what they need to know about opioids” (“*Melanie’s Law*,” 2023). Also, almost every school now has a page about fentanyl awareness on their school

website, which can help people become aware of just how deadly and dangerous this drug can be and how/what you can do to help prevent an overdose or save a person's life.

Last month, Dr. Miguel Cardona, the Secretary of Education (United States Department of Education), and Dr. Rahul Gupta, the director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, released a letter to every single school across the United States to bring awareness to fentanyl and how naloxone is available for everyone to help save lives. They said, "There is no time to waste when responding to an overdose, and it is critical that youth and school personnel can access naloxone on school grounds during and after school. Thank you for your partnership in protecting the health of our nation's students. We look forward to continuing to work together to address youth substance use and to save lives" (Cardona & Gupta, 2023). This is another significant step in the right direction taken by the federal government to make sure our students stay safe in schools and to have preventative measures like naloxone in case there is an overdose so we can save the student's life. "Data shows that two-thirds of adolescent drug poisoning deaths occurred with a potential bystander nearby, but naloxone was often not administered" (Cardona & Gupta, 2023). Imagine the potential of saving lives now that there will be naloxone available and nearby to be administered so that two-thirds can have naloxone and save their lives if it happens again.

All in all, fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered. It is so toxic that just taking a tiny little bit of it will kill you. Fentanyl has crept into our schools and has sadly taken the lives of many young kids. Fentanyl is approximately 100 times stronger than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin, and over 150 people die every day from overdoses related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Preventative measures are being put in place at the local, state, and federal levels to make sure that if there is an emergency overdose at a

school, there is naloxone on hand to help save the student's life. Every person who works in a school should be trained to administer naloxone to help keep their students' lives if needed. Now more than ever, it is essential to become aware of how dangerous fentanyl is and what you can do to help save people's lives, especially our youth in schools.

Resources

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